ablaut
This is a process whereby the base form of a word undergoes an internal vowel change, resulting in a change to function or meaning. It also refers to the outcome of that process. Ablaut originated as a process in Proto-Indo-European. As a result, modern Indo-European languages have inherited ablauts. If you have ever learned a modern Indo-European language as a second language, you may have had a teacher carefully point out irregular verbs. These irregular verbs are often ones that contain ablauts in certain forms. Take the Spanish word poder (to be able to). In the first person present form, poder becomes puedo, where the internal vowel <o> becomes <ue>. An English example is the verb drink, whose past tense and past participle forms (drank and drunk) are generated via ablaut, rather than by the addition of an -ed inflection, which is what happens with regular verbs (e.g. ‘She jumped the furthest’ and ‘She has jumped the furthest’).

accent
Your accent is the way that you pronounce your particular dialect. In British English, for instance, the Yorkshire accent differs from the Birmingham accent. Your accent can indicate where you are from, what social class you belong to, how formally educated you might be, what community you wish to identify with, and so on. As a result of this connection to identity, people make value judgements about accents. It used to be the case that newsreaders on the BBC all spoke Received Pronunciation (RP), the so-called ‘Queen’s English’. Nowadays, it’s common to hear the news being read in a wide range of accents, from Yorkshire to Geordie to Scouse. But, although it’s no longer strange to hear people on TV speaking Standard English (dialect) with a regional accent, it would be unusual to hear
2 accommodation

someone speaking a regional dialect using RP. And, while it is still unfortunately true that people can be judged on the accent they speak, in communicative terms, no accent is any better or worse than any other.

accommodation
This is a term from sociolinguistics and refers to the practice of unconsciously (or, on occasion, consciously) adjusting the way we speak in relation to someone else’s language variety as a result of spending time with them. Elements of language that may be affected include, for example, lexis, pronunciation and stress patterns. Reasons why a person’s linguistic behaviour may converge with the people they are talking to include a desire for approval, recognition of a person’s status, and (romantic) attraction. Conversely, a speaker may consciously or unconsciously diverge from the linguistic behaviour of people around them, as a means of signalling social distance from them, or to emphasise or reinforce their membership of a different speech community. See also upward convergence and downward convergence.

acoustic phonetics
This is a subfield within phonetics that is specifically concerned with the physical properties of sounds. Acoustic phoneticians consider both the waveform and the spectrogram in their analyses of speech, in order to measure aspects of frequency, intensity and/or temporal domains. Acoustic phonetics has grown tremendously over recent years, largely thanks to the open-access software Praat, which allows everyone from the beginner to the seasoned acoustic phonetician the opportunity to explore the physical manifestations of sound.

acrolect
This refers to a version of a language that is seen as the standard variety, or the one that is viewed as the most prestigious. Acrolects are based on socially constructed beliefs that one form of language is preferred over others. In Hawaii, Standard American English is seen as the acrolect and superior to Hawaiian Creole. See also basilect, creole and mesolect.
**acronym**

This is the term for a label that is formed from the initial letters of a phrase. This is usually to simplify a complex or long description for ease of communication, though acronyms can also have the effect of excluding or confusing people who don’t know their origin. Acronyms are all around us. Many have become so common that people often don’t realise they are acronyms at all. **Words** such as *scuba* (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), *radar* (radio detection and ranging) and *laser* (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) are all examples of acronyms that have become commonly used words. One indication of this is the fact that they are now conventionally written in lower-case letters. Acronyms are also commonly used in **linguistics**. *KWIC*, pronounced /ˈkwɪk/, stands for ‘key word in context’ and is found in **corpus linguistics** (see also **concordance**). Databases and software are also often referred to by acronyms – for example, *WYRED* (West Yorkshire Regional English Database) or *CLiC* (Corpus Linguistics in Context). The difference between acronyms and **initialisms** is that acronyms are pronounced as complete words (e.g. *radar* is /ˈreɪdər/) while initialisms are pronounced by articulating each constituent letter (e.g. /ˈɛs eɪ ɛs/ for *SAS*).

**active**

Active structures place the **Actor** in a process at the start of the **sentence** in **subject** position, and the **Goal** in **object** position after the verb, e.g. ‘The builders mended the roof.’ This term is usually applied to transitive structures (where the verb requires an object), which are implicitly paired with **passive** structures.

**Actor**

This refers to the participant responsible for the process in a clause. Often functioning as the grammatical subject, this is a label associated with **Systemic Functional Linguistics**, which emphasises semantic over syntactic functions. In the sentence ‘Matt ran a marathon’, Matt is the Actor. But he is also the Actor in ‘The department was kept afloat by Matt’, a **passive** structure with **Goal** as **subject**.
This refers to the initiation of a linguistic change. There are numerous explanations for why linguistic changes are initiated. These include preserving uniformity, hole-filling, reanalysis, misperception and expressiveness. Preserving uniformity often involves a move towards regularity; for example, the formation of the plural in English is now largely achieved by adding an -s-inflection (or related form such as -ies). This differs from how plurals were formed in Old English, where there was a much wider range of plural inflections available (some have survived in words like oxen and children). Hole-filling is the process of filling a gap in the linguistic system, such as when the pronunciation of a vowel changes, leaving a gap in the vowel space that then needs to be filled by a different vowel (see the Great Vowel Shift for more details of this kind of change). Reanalysis involves reinterpreting the structure of a particular linguistic form. For example, the constituent morphemes of the word helicopter are derived from the Greek words helix (spiral) and pteron (wing). Reanalysis, however, has led to an understanding of the constituent morphemes as being heli and copter. As a result of this reanalysis, lexical innovation was made possible, resulting in such terms as helipad, heliport and gyrocopter. Misperception, as you might expect, is the process of linguistic change being initiated by a misunderstanding. It is possible, for instance, that one of the causes of the decline of the Old English inflectional system was the fact that inflections were unstressed and therefore less likely to be heard in conversation than stressed syllables. Non-native speakers of Old English (Scandinavian invaders, perhaps) who were attempting to communicate with Anglo-Saxon people may consequently not have produced inflections simply as a result of not having heard them in speech. Finally, expressiveness explains the deliberate initiation of a linguistic change. Lexical developments are often the result of expressiveness; consider, for instance, the extension of the word racist to function as a censure for any assertion that the hearer doesn’t agree with (e.g. Speaker 1: ‘Sheffield United are crap.’ / Speaker 2: ‘That is so racist’). See also propagation.
adjacency pair

In Conversation Analysis, an adjacency pair is a set of speaker turns (see turn) that fit together functionally; i.e. the first turn usually invites a particular second turn. Adjacency pairs were first discussed by the conversation analysts Emmanuel Schegloff and Harvey Sacks, who found that conversation appeared to be organised in two-turn sequences, in which one person speaks and then another person responds. Some canonical examples of adjacency pairs include questions and answers, greeting pairs, and request / acceptance or rejection pairs. The first turn in an adjacency pair is referred to as the first-pair part and the second is the second-pair part. For example:

First-pair part (question): Will you go out with me?
Second-pair part (answer): No, sorry. I don’t fancy you.

Adjacency pairs sometimes occur over several turns, as in cases where clarification is needed before the adjacency pair can be completed. The turns that come between an adjacency pair are called insertion sequences and may take the form of, for example, clarificatory questions within a question-answer pair. For instance:

First-pair part (question 1): Will you go out with me?
Insertion sequence: Question 2: Are you rich?
Answer 2: No.
Second-pair part (answer 1): No, sorry. I don’t fancy you.

Adjacency pairs are a fundamental unit of organisation in conversation and the study of patterns in adjacency pairs allows linguists to get a better understanding of how conversations are organised by speakers engaged in interactions.

adjective

Adjectives function either as the head of an adjective phrase (e.g. hungry in ‘I am very hungry’) or as modifiers in a noun phrase (e.g. large and brown in ‘The large, brown cows’). Many common adjectives are gradable and have three forms: a base form, a comparative form and a superlative form. It’s often possible to tell whether a word is an adjective by seeing whether you can make a comparative or superlative form from it.
6 adjective phrase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
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<td>Regular</td>
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<td></td>
<td>slow</td>
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<td>beautiful</td>
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<td>most beautiful</td>
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<td>Irregular</td>
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<td></td>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Usually, adjectives specify some quality or property attributed to a noun. For example, physical qualities (‘The large, brown cow’), psychological qualities (‘The fierce cow’), evaluative qualities (‘The most beautiful cow’), etc.

adjective phrase

Adjective phrases have an adjective as their head word and may include one or more modifying adverbs, which are often known as intensifiers as they specify the amount or intensity of the quality referred to by the adjective. In the following examples, the adjective phrase is underlined and its head word is italicised:

• The car was bright green.
• It was absolutely hideous.
• In fact, it was far too awful.

Adjective phrases function as a complement in a sentence. See also SPOCA.

advanced

This refers to the place of articulation (in the mouth) of the sound being produced. Advanced sounds are produced further forward (i.e. nearer the lips) than their expected target (advanced can be contrasted with retracted). Both vowels and consonants can be described as advanced, but vowels are more commonly described in this way. There is a specific diacritic in the International Phonetic Alphabet assigned to the term advanced. This is a small plus sign placed under the sound being described. For example, [u] describes a [u] that is produced further forward in the mouth.

adverb

Adverbs function as the head of an adverb phrase. Sometimes the head is preceded by modifiers, which are often adverbs of degree. Here are some examples (the adverb phrase is underlined and the head is in italics):
The professor gesticulated *wildly*.
He spoke exceptionally *loudly*.
The students applauded very *enthusiastically* indeed.

Adverbs can also function as modifiers in adjective phrases (the *adjective phrase* is underlined and the modifying adverb is italicised):

I am *extremely* hungry.
The professor was *very* pleased.
It was *too* hot.

Adverbs in English often end in -ly but using this test to determine whether a *word* is an adverb is not a foolproof method, as you will have noticed from the examples above. It’s also the case that sometimes what looks like an adverb is actually an adjective – e.g. *friendly*. (For this reason, looking at the function of a word in a sentence is a better indicator of what *word class* it belongs to than what its *form* or *meaning* is.) Some adverbs also have *comparative* and *superlative* forms (e.g. ‘He danced well/better/best’; ‘She danced gracefully/more gracefully/most gracefully’).

When they are not modifying adjectives (e.g. *really* hot), adverbs modify *verbs*; that is, they give more information about the action, process, state, etc., described in the *verb phrase*. Adverbs can express manner (*quickly*, *well*), place (*here*, *there*, *somewhere*), time (*now*, *then*, *last night*, *six weeks ago*), duration (*constantly*, *briefly*, *always*), frequency (*daily*, *weekly*) and degree (*hardly*, *rather*, *quite*).

**adverb phrase**

Adverb phrases have an *adverb* as their *head word*. In the examples below, the adverb phrase is underlined and the head is in italics:

- Erica writes *very quickly*.
- Matt writes absolutely *spiffingly*.
- Dan writes *worse* than Lesley.

An adverb phrase functions as an *adverbial* in a *clause* or *sentence*. It can also modify an adjective in an *adjective phrase*. See also *SPOCA*.

**adverbial**

An adverbial is a *clause* element in some theories of *grammar* that modifies the *predicat* by providing information about the manner, time or place of the event being described in the *sentence*.
In some frameworks, they may be called *adjuncts*. Here are some examples (underlined):

1. Hazel baked a cake yesterday.
2. She ate it in the evening.
3. That night she felt sick.
4. After taking an indigestion tablet, she felt fine.

Adverbials can be formed from *adverbs* or *adverb phrases* (as in example (1), above), *prepositional phrases* (2), *noun phrases* (3) and *adverb clauses* (4). In contrast to other clause elements, such as the *subject, object* or *predicator*, adverbials in English are relatively flexible in terms of where they can appear in the clause.

For example:

- The cat walked to his bowl lazily.
- Lazily, the cat walked to his bowl.
- The cat lazily walked to his bowl.

In principle, a sentence can contain an infinite number of adverbials. A good example of how adverbials can be piled up can be seen in the introductory narration to a classic children’s TV programme, *Noggin the Nog*, which was popular in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s (the adverbials are underlined):

> In the lands of the North, where the Black Rocks stand guard against the cold sea, in the dark night that is very long, the Men of the Northlands sit by their great log fires and they tell a tale.

The number of adverbials in this particular sentence also creates a *foregrounding* effect, focusing attention on the final unmodified clause ‘they tell a tale’. See also *SPOCA and complement*.

**affix**

An affix is a *morpheme* that is added to the *base form* / *stem* / *root* of a *word* in order to create a new word or modify the existing base form. An affix placed before the base form is a *prefix*, while one that occurs after it is a *suffix*. For example, we can create the semantic opposite of the word *happy* by adding a prefix: *unhappy*. We can change the *word class* (also known as *part of speech*) of *happy* from adjective to noun by adding a suffix: *happiness*. The
question of how the base form changes (if at all) in order to accommodate the affix is something that can be studied in morphology. See also infix.

affricate
This refers to a set of sounds that are classified according to their manner of articulation. Affricates begin with a stop and are immediately followed by a fricative, e.g. /tʃ/ (the pronunciation of <ch> in English). The air in an affricate is first obstructed like a stop, and then released through a constricted channel that causes turbulent airflow.

agglutination
This is a process in morphology whereby a string of morphemes is put together to create a more complex word. Turkish and Swahili are two languages that use agglutination. An example of agglutination in Turkish is ev-ler-den, meaning ‘from [the] houses’. Languages that feature high levels of agglutination are known as agglutinative languages.

airflow
This refers to the flow of air through the vocal tract. In speech, sounds are produced with one of two types of airflow: egressive or ingressive. Egressive sounds have an airflow that moves out of the vocal tract (through the mouth and/or nose), while an ingressive airflow involves air flowing into the vocal tract. The majority of speech sounds have egressive airflow because it is easier to speak for longer whilst breathing out. Try reciting a rhyme on an egressive and then an ingressive airflow and you will see why. However, it isn’t difficult to produce an ingressive sound (think about the ingressive gasp you might make if you are shocked). Ingressive airflow is also used paralinguistically by speakers of Scandinavian languages to signal agreement.

airstream mechanism
This is one of three components (along with phonation and articulation) that are vital in the production of speech. Airflow is needed in order to produce speech, and we rely on three different types of airstream mechanisms to initiate this airflow. The three
types of airstream mechanisms used in producing speech are **pulmonic**, **glottalic** and **velaric**. Pulmonic sounds require airflow to be initiated from the **lungs**, and the majority of the world’s sounds are produced pulmonically. The rarer airstream of glottalic sounds is initiated by the **glottis**, while velaric airstreams are initiated with the **tongue**.

**alliteration**

This is a term given to the repetition of the same **consonant** sound at the start of a series of **words**. Alliteration is a feature of many famous literary works, including this line from Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Raven’ which repeats the word-initial /d/ sound:

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.

In addition to the high literature of Poe, alliteration can also be found in many other text-types, from adverts to comedy sketches. Here’s a nice example from a *Monty Python* comedy sketch (‘Bells’), in which a man is complaining to his wife about the ‘religious racket’ of the church bells:

*Husband:* We don’t get Buddhists playing bagpipes in our bathroom, or Hindus harmonizing in the hall. The Shintoists don’t come ‘ere shattering sheet glass in the shithouse and shouting slogans.

*Wife:* All right, don’t practise your alliteration on me.

**allomorph**

This is a term in **morphology** that refers to the different ways in which a single **morpheme** can be produced. Allomorphs are the morphological equivalent of **allophones** which are variants of one **phoneme**. Which allomorph is used depends on either the phonological or morphological properties of the **word** it is a part of. An example of allomorphic variation based on morphological conditions can be seen in the words *vain* and *vanity*, in which adding the –*ity* **bound morpheme** results in a change in the morpheme that precedes it.

- *vain* without affixation → /veɪn/
- *vain* plus affixation (-*ity*) → /væn/